

Kirklees - fighting £400 million budget cut

AFTER MONTHS of delays and deliberation by the leadership of Unison both locally and regionally, Kirklees Unison has voted to ballot for strike action against cuts and redundancies.

A Unison member

Alongside the redundancies are plans to cut redundancy pay, to redesign all positions with related reductions in salary and to limit the time available on redeployment for employees whose roles are downgraded or abolished.

Outrageously, the council has continued to insist that sickness absence will be used when considering who should be made redundant and who should be retained; with no clarity whatsoever about how this would be applied. Kirklees staff are often too scared to be off sick, knowing that this could well be used against them in the future.

An extremely vocal meeting on 11 November of over 100 Unison mem-

bers led to an enthusiastic endorsement of the need to strike. Socialist Party members spoke in the discussion and questioned why the union continues to donate massive sums of members' money to the Labour Party when this Labour council is attacking union members. This was met with rapturous applause.

However, Socialist Party members are entirely realistic about the difficult battles ahead. The council has managed to delay industrial action with various empty undertakings and broken promises.

Briefings have been held with workers during which management has drip fed a mantra of there being 'no alternative' to the cuts, said that frontline staff will be protected and that the union is exaggerating the scale of the cuts. Morale amongst council employees has weakened, with many workers feeling that the union has been too reluctant to fight and to stand up for members' rights and interests.

The Socialist Party will continue to support the strike committee and to



An effective anti-cuts campaign must be built. photo Yorkshire SP

convene workplace meetings. We will also hold campaigning stalls to engage with members of the public and to argue the case for industrial action.

A strong 'Yes' vote with a strong

turnout will send a clear message to the Labour council and to the ConDem government that their determination to bury public services will be resisted and ultimately defeated.

Victory in law centre battle

SOUTH MANCHESTER Law Centre provides free and affordable legal services to people on low incomes, and yet it has to fight for survival after cuts in funding.

As previously reported in The Socialist, the campaign applied for a judicial review and on 8 November it won permission to be heard in January.

So now the Legal Services Commission (LSC) is spending more money on court cases to enforce a cut in funding! The LSC forked out for a QC and barrister to oppose the campaign's application for a judicial review, after losing a similar case in September over the funding of family law contracts.

Lobbying the LSC's Manchester office on 15 November, campaigners chanted: "LSC justice - no justice!" The campaign distributed a statement, urging the LSC to "stop defending the indefensible. Instead of wasting further public funds on expensive lawyers they should restore funding to make South Manchester Law Centre sustainable".

The campaign urges you to: Send emails of protest to the LSC at Carolyn.downs@legalservices.gsi.gov.uk and legal.lsc@legalservices.gsi.gov.uk

Go to the website www.smlc.org.uk and Facebook group "Save South



photo Hugh Caffrey

Manchester Law Centre"

Join the lobby of the council on 8 December from 9am, (the Shop Stewards Network will be lobbying from 7.30am), at the town hall in Albert Square, Manchester city centre

Join the campaign when the judicial review goes to court on 4 and 5 January, 9.30am, Manchester High Court, Bridge Street West, city centre.

The campaign meets every Tuesday evening. For more information contact admin@smlc.org.uk or call 0161 225 5111

Jobs threat in Knowsley

Council officers announced 400 job losses on 9 November in Knowsley, north Merseyside, with more to follow. Jeff Bowe, a Knowsley Unison member, explained the situation to Hugh Caffrey:

WE MET with council officers when the job losses were announced. The context to this is a £30 million black hole in the authority's finances, which we already knew about, on the back of central government spending cuts. What the council have done now is quantify that to mean at least 400 redundancies.

I think it's hard to conceive of 400 people magically volunteering for redundancy in the current climate.

We also know that there will be a further package of cuts to terms and conditions. In 2012-13 the authority is planning a further £16 million round of cuts, meaning that over two and a half years almost £50 million is being cut from a budget of £170 million, so it's massive.

The effects will be devastating. Of course there will be the human and economic impact on our members. But it is impossible to take that amount of money out of services without harming frontline services.

A couple of things are worth mentioning especially. We're aware that this is happening up and down the country, that all

local authorities are in the same boat because of the central government cuts.

Knowsley is a particularly socially deprived borough. Lots of our members work and live within the local authority, and will be facing a double whammy of being at risk from whatever the central government decides to do to benefits while at the same time facing cuts in the council services on which they rely.

We will now be consulting, together with the other unions, over what action we want to take. In normal times members would be looking towards industrial action, and I wouldn't rule that out, but as we know we are not living in normal times and so I think members are looking for more than that.

People are looking for a broader alliance together with community groups and people who use the services we provide, and while we're confronted first of all by the employer, which is the local authority, then this situation demands a wider political and industrial strategy than just the traditional one or two day strike and a collective bargaining solution.

inbrief

Southampton strike

NUJ members mounted a successful picket at the Daily Echo offices in Southampton last week as part of their fight for decent pay. As journalists struggle with a pay freeze since July 2008, a director at 'hardpressed' Newsquest awarded himself a massive 21.5% pay rise.

Barry Fitzpatrick, national NUJ officer and Sally Churchward, Echo MOC, said support for the strike had been very strong with large numbers of members supporting the pickets from early in the morning. "Membership has increased to over 80%." A further two day strike planned for 16 and 17 November has been suspended pending negotiations.

NUJ members on the Brighton Argus will be striking on 18 and 19 November, after Newsquest announced plans to move production to Southampton.

Send messages of support to dailyechochapel@yahoo.co.uk and donations to 'NUJ Southampton Special' and post cheques to NUJ Treasurer, Canute House, Petersfield Road, Cheriton, Alresford, SO24 0NH or directly into bank account 'NUJ Southampton Special' sort code 086001 account number 20181226

Wales rail strike

Train drivers' union Aslef members employed by Arriva Trains Wales are to strike on 26 and 27 November in a dispute over pay. 92% of those voting in a turnout of 80% voted for strike action.

Aslef says its members will not be penalised for working in Wales, where driver pay rates are lower than the rest of the UK.

The RMT is also balloting its members at Arriva Trains Wales over the same issues, their ballot will close on 30 November.

Merseyrail

The RMT is balloting staff on Merseyrail, excluding guards and drivers. Two pay offers have been rejected by the workers. The ballot runs from 15 to 30 November.

RMT election

Socialist Party member Lewis Peacock is standing for election to the RMT's council of executives. Lewis has been an RMT member for 21 years, working on London Underground. He is standing on a programme of defending jobs and fighting the cuts, building on the union's fighting policies. He is also calling for the development of a new workers' party, to provide a political alternative to the establishment parties. Voting is continuing until mid December.

Teachers' pensions

The national executive of the teachers' union NUT agreed unanimously at its November meeting to ballot for strike action over pensions. This will take place in the spring.

Government plans so far show an attempt to make teachers pay more and work longer for a lower pension. The exact timetable for the ballot will be agreed in December.

BBC latest

NUJ members at the BBC suspended their strike action planned for 15 and 16 November, pending negotiations. This is after a very successful two-day strike on 5 and 6 November. The dispute is over threats to pensions.

Ballot cancelled in BA dispute

IN A dramatic twist to the long running saga of the British Airways cabin crew dispute Unite have cancelled the ballot on the latest offer from the company.

Neil Cafferky

This comes after the stewards committees of the two Unite cabin crew branches, BASSA (British Airlines Stewards & Stewardesses Association) and Amicus cabin crew voted to recommend a 'No' vote to their respective membership.

The national leadership of Unite and BASSA had originally agreed to

recommend the deal. This was one of the company's conditions for presenting the deal.

However, according to a statement by the BASSA leadership on 9 November, once the full details of the deal, which included a promise from Unite to withdraw legal aid to members who wished to take legal proceedings against disciplinary action, became clear BASSA felt they could no longer recommend the deal.

Tony Woodley, joint general secretary of Unite stated: "Any sense that this offer is being presented to cabin crew over the heads of unwilling representatives would be deeply

damaging to the union and its members above all."

If the deal had been rejected by the membership the union would serve notice of a strike ballot to the company.

This seems to be the most likely outcome although no announcement as to when a ballot will commence has been made yet. Strike action before Christmas cannot be entirely ruled out although the window for this to happen is rapidly closing.

• For more socialist news and analysis on BA go to the Socialist Party blog Air Strike at airstrikes.wordpress.com.

National Shop Stewards Network Anti-cuts conference

Saturday 22 January 2011, 11.30am - 3.30pm

South Camden Community School, Charrington Street, London NW1 1RG.

See also www.shopstewards.net